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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 000899

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SUBJECT: PML-N SEES MISSED OPPORTUNITY FOR POLITICAL CONSENSUS

Classified By: CDA Gerald Feierstein, for reasons 1.4 (b)(d)

¶1. (C) Summary. According to Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) members Ishak Dar and Ahsan Iqbal, Nawaz Sharif was disappointed that President Zardari did not seem to share Prime Minister Gilani's enthusiasm for calling an all-parties conference to work out a united political front on security issues. Senator Dar felt the government had mistakenly lost an opportunity to forge political consensus before military operations, which he insisted his party supports, resumed against militants in the Northwest Frontier Province. This is consistent with PML-N's efforts to weaken Pakistan People's Party support for Zardari, who instead of agreeing to a conference with Nawaz met April 27 with the joint parliamentary committee on security.

¶2. (C) Dar also explained that PML-N Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif recognized the connection between growing popular demands for justice and extremism; in response, he soon may require provincial officials to reserve time each morning to hear citizen complaints. Dar expressed confidence that Nawaz would win his newly introduced cases in the Supreme Court to overturn his convictions for corruption and hijacking but insisted PML-N did not want mid-term elections and would continue to support the government from the opposition benches. End Summary.

#### Support for Military Action

¶3. (C) During an April 28 lunch with Charge and A/DCM, Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) Senator Ishak Dar reiterated his party's concern about the declining security situation and said PML-N did support military action against the militants. He also thought the Swat deal was all but defunct and would soon be abandoned by the government under the excuse that TNSM leader Sufi Mohammed had been unable to convince the Taliban to abide by the agreement. Dar expected that there would be military action in Swat in the coming days.

¶4. (C) Dar faulted the Nizam-e-Adl Regulation in Swat for establishing a new appeals process apart from the existing judicial structure and said the system PML-N in 1999 and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) in 1994 had implemented was better. (Note: The Awami National Party cites poor implementation in 1994 and 1999 as reasons for the latest change.) Dar doubted the Northwest Frontier Province provincial government would be able to implement Nizam-e-Adl at this point.

¶ 15. (C) But, explained Dar, justice for the common man was a serious issue across the country. PML-N Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif was considering proposals this week to require provincial government officers to make themselves available from 0830-1000 every day to hear citizen complaints. Shahbaz was also examining plans to support alternative dispute resolution programs to ease crowding in the courts, many of which are bogged down in land dispute cases. Dar agreed that the taliban in Swat and Punjab were exploiting a popular sense of injustice. Charge noted that USAID is working on a program to improve administration of the courts and speed case adjudication.

#### Missed Opportunities

¶ 16. (C) Dar expressed his disappointment that President Zardari apparently had not shared PM Gilani's enthusiasm for calling an all-parties conference to craft a united political position on the security situation. PML-N leader Nawaz Sharif had been ready to meet (and had even postponed a trip to Europe) but now Zardari was leaving the country without a meeting. The National Assembly had adjourned without debating the promised new resolution on the security situation. This was a strategic mistake, said Dar, because the government could/should have used current concern to build a consensus before military action resumed. He agreed there was a growing number of civil society members ready to protest against extremism, but they needed to be led.

¶ 17. (C) While asserting that Pakistan needed some kind of a

ISLAMABAD 00000899 002 OF 002

unity government right now, Dar was not optimistic that divergent political forces would be able to work together. He recalled that last year Zardari had asked him to return to the cabinet as Finance Minister, but he had declined out of concern over what he termed Zardari's lack of fiscal accountability. Still, Dar believed that PML-N and the religious parties would support GOP efforts to form a political consensus that could inform policy. He lamented, however, that what was missing was implementation. He joked that in 1998 when he was previously Finance Minister negotiating with the IMF on a previous agreement, the international financial institutions had the same complaint about the three things missing in Pakistan: implementation, implementation, and implementation.

¶ 18. (C) Dar confirmed press reports that Nawaz was challenging his convictions in 2000 for corruption and hijacking. He expressed confidence that the courts would support Nawaz and even suggested that the Supreme Court could overturn the two-term limit on prime ministers that was imposed by former President Musharraf. (Note: Most analysts believe eliminating the two-term limit will require a constitutional amendment.) Dar insisted that PML-N had no interest in mid-term elections and continued to support the government from the opposition benches.

¶ 19. (C) Separately, A/DCM met April 24 with PML-N Information Secretary Ahsan Iqbal. Iqbal, who is a member of the National Assembly, had just requested that ISI and the Army provide the Assembly with a briefing on the current situation in Swat and said Nawaz had called PM Gilani to suggest an all-parties conference. He complained that, despite a joint parliamentary committee on security, the GOP was not taking the opposition parties into confidence on security policy and actions. When pressed for PML-N's solution, Iqbal evaded the question saying that if Nawaz came out with a policy, it would seen be as an assault on the government.

¶ 10. (C) Iqbal, who had just returned from a whirlwind visit to think tanks in Washington, urged that the USG implement more exchange programs to strengthen linkages between U.S. and Pakistani parliamentarians and think tanks. A/DCM said

we had been sending parliamentarians to the U.S. and certainly would continue to do so. Iqbal also supported efforts by the Pakistani Ministries of Religious and Information to sponsor conferences of moderate and respected religious leaders from across the religious spectrum to counter the taliban by presenting an alternative interpretation of Islam.

¶11. (C) Comment: PML-N's support for an all-parties conference is a way to influence decisions without actually joining the government and demonstrate that Zardari needs help governing. Supporting Gilani against Zardari also is consistent with PML-N's efforts to weaken PPP support for Zardari. Zardari avoided a conference with Nawaz but did meet April 27 with the joint parliamentary committee on security to show he was consulting across political lines. Meanwhile, PML-N is working to clear legal/constitutional obstacles that would permit Nawaz to return eventually as Prime Minister.

FEIERSTEIN